



Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

Delivered By

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**At the informal meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the 20th anniversary of
the mandate on children and armed conflict**

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20th anniversary event – SRSG Children and Armed Conflict

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I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of Resolution 51/77, which created the mandate on children and armed conflict, the European Union restates its strong support for the CAAC mandate, for SRSG Leila Zerrougui, and for UNICEF and all other UN bodies working to protect children affected by armed conflict.

In the twenty years since the General Assembly created the mandate, we have seen significant progress. A coherent normative and policy framework and strong institutional mechanisms have been developed, and concrete steps have been taken to protect children in conflict situations. Since 2000, more than 115 000 child soldiers have been released, 27 Action Plans have been signed with parties to conflict, and the Security Council has adopted 11 resolutions on children and armed conflict. There have been 166 ratifications of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

We deeply appreciate the unstinting efforts of SRSG Zerrougui, who has made an indispensable contribution to the advancement of the CAAC agenda. The EU is a strong supporter of the 'Children, not Soldiers' campaign, launched by the SRSG and UNICEF in 2014, and we welcome the SRSG's courageous work to engage with non-state armed groups, who, as we know, make up the majority of parties listed in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

This month we will also mark the 10th anniversary of The Paris Commitments to Protect Children Unlawfully Recruited or Used by Armed Forces or Armed Groups, and The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. The Paris Principles and Commitments, endorsed by 105 member states, provide crucial guidance on the sustainable demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers and remain very relevant today.

Unfortunately, serious challenges remain for the protection of children affected by armed conflict. We note with particular concern the increase in attacks on schools and hospitals and their use for military purposes. Governments and all other actors must protect schools and hospitals by upholding the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Violent extremism is significantly affecting children who are often direct targets, including the abhorrent practice of using children as suicide bombers. Approaches to fighting and preventing violent extremism need to be comprehensive and address the root causes, such as protracted conflict, but also the lack of good governance, rule of law or education. We also see forced displacement as a particular challenge with an ever-growing number of children fleeing in search of protection, making them particularly vulnerable.

The protection and the promotion of children's rights, including the issue of children and armed conflict, are central to the EU's human rights policy and financing instruments.

The EU's Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019) ensures a comprehensive human rights approach to conflicts and crises, and it includes a specific commitment for the EU to support the work of the UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict. We continue to implement the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, which were adopted in 2003, and the protection of children and armed conflict is mainstreamed in the planning and implementation of EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

EU development aid finances a range of projects for child victims of armed conflicts, which promote safe access to basic services, help protect children from all forms of violence, and support their reintegration into societies. EU projects funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument are supporting children associated with armed forces and groups, and children impacted by armed violence, including in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Sudan, the Syrian Crisis, Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen. In 2016, the EU allocated over EUR 3 million in humanitarian aid to activities that specifically targeted child soldiers and children associated with armed forces and armed groups, and globally over EUR 23 million was assigned to child protection activities.

Furthermore, in 2016 the EU provided EUR 62 million from its humanitarian budget for education in emergencies, and we will increase this funding in 2017.

In concluding, let me underline that the EU believes the CAAC mandate to be as important now as it was when it was created by the General Assembly 20 years ago. Progress has been achieved, but continued commitment is needed to ensure that the mandate remains effective and responsive to the threats facing children in situations of armed conflict.

Thank you.